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Chairperson: Ms. Gittens-Joseph ..... (Trinidad and Tobago)
Later: Ms. de Wet (Vice-Chairperson) ..... (Namibia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 109: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (*continued*) (A/55/12 and Add.1, A/55/471, A/55/472 and A/55/506-S/2000/1006)

1. **Ms. Mitry** (Egypt) paid tribute to Ms. Ogata for the remarkable work she had accomplished during her mandate and congratulated her successor. In recent years, conflicts affecting many countries had aggravated the refugee problem and had posed a variety of challenges to the international community. Pursuant to article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in accordance with the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, it was the duty of the international community to protect refugees, provide them with the necessary services and ensure their return to their countries of origin. In that regard, the principle of voluntary repatriation must remain at the heart of the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Similarly, every effort must be made to bring to justice all those responsible for violations of the norms of international law because justice was a basic component for the peaceful and lasting settlement of conflicts. Reaffirming the close relationship between the right of asylum and basic rights, she noted that asylum was a form of right to life for refugees.

2. The situation of refugees, returning refugees and displaced persons in Africa and the Middle East continued to be of serious concern to the international community. The United Nations should place at the top of its agenda efforts to ensure the return of refugees, including Palestinians, to their countries of origin, provide assurances for their safety, dignity and ensure the payment of compensation for the property lost by refugees as a result of their expulsion, displacement or the occupation of their territories. The provisions of General Assembly resolution 194 of 11 December 1948, which confirmed the right of return of Palestinian refugees and called upon the Israeli authorities to respect international instruments and conventions guaranteeing the rights of expelled Palestinians, should be implemented without any reservations.

3. Despite some encouraging signs noted in the report of the High Commissioner (A/55/12), the international community needed to redouble its efforts to address the special problem posed by the refugee situation in Africa. It must assist those refugees not only because their presence constituted a lasting obstacle to economic and social development, but also because it threatened the security and stability of many States, including host countries.

4. It was also important to ensure the safety of personnel responsible for the protection of refugees and prevent parties to conflicts from using refugees as strategic pawns. In consultation with all those involved in humanitarian activities, an integrated approach needed to be adopted to the refugee problem that took into account its political, economic, social, military and other dimensions and respected the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of States in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.

5. **Mr. Mangachi** (United Republic of Tanzania) endorsed the statement made the previous day by the representative of Mozambique on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on the agenda item under consideration. He praised the work accomplished by UNHCR throughout its 50 years of existence and noted that his country had hosted a large number of refugees from southern Africa and the Great Lakes region for over 40 years. Some of the refugees had since been voluntarily repatriated to their countries of origin. The majority of the refugees still present in his country came from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

6. The United Republic of Tanzania had never placed any quotas on the number of asylum-seekers, despite the immense economic and social costs and considerable security problems that their presence caused. The Tanzanian population was becoming weary of the traditional hospitality extended to refugees as a result of the cyclical nature of refugee flows in the region, environmental degradation, the spread of diseases and the increase in crime. Furthermore, when supplies to refugee camps were inadequate, the refugees tended to become aggressive and violent towards the local population.

7. His delegation shared the concern expressed in the report of the High Commissioner (A/55/12) with respect to the security of both refugees and humanitarian personnel. The issue of security had become increasingly important in recent years. That

was the reason why his country found itself in the very difficult situation of hosting more than 800,000 refugees. His Government appreciated all the more the assistance provided by UNHCR and other donor countries to bolster its capacity to deal with security in refugee camps. He noted with appreciation that UNHCR had recently expanded its security operation by deploying additional field officers in the refugee-affected areas.

8. His Government continued to believe that voluntary repatriation was the cornerstone of any lasting solution to the refugee problem. However, repatriation could not take place before the conflicts in the country of origin were resolved. Nor could a lasting solution be found in the absence of reconciliation. Local integration in cases of mass influxes such as those witnessed by his country was not a feasible solution. On the other hand, resettlement in a third country should be encouraged. His delegation hoped that the global consultations that UNHCR had initiated would be comprehensive enough.

9. In conclusion, he paid tribute to Ms. Ogata for her exemplary work in the service of refugees and other vulnerable populations over the past 10 years. His Government also welcomed Mr. Lubbers to his new post and pledged its full cooperation.

10. **Ms. Korneliouk** (Belarus), after expressing appreciation to Ms. Ogata, said that Belarus had realized in recent years that uncontrolled migratory movements had negative effects on the stability and security of many societies. Belarus, which was at the crossroads of European routes, received influxes of illegal migrants from the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Near East. Their number was estimated at 200,000, which was high considering that Belarus had only 10.3 million inhabitants. That situation had adverse economic and social repercussions in that it led to an increase in crime, a growth in drug trafficking, and the emergence of a black market for labour.

11. Under those circumstances, it was understandable that her Government was deeply concerned about the problem of refugees and migrants, and was trying to resolve it while respecting the fundamental rights and freedoms of nationals of the Republic. Belarus had recently adopted a number of legislative and regulatory texts on the subject, including an act on refugees, an act on foreign migrant workers, and an act supplementing and amending the act on refugees. It should be noted that all those texts were in conformity with the provisions of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Since 1 July 1998, her Government had established a procedure for determining the status of refugees and, over the past few years, the commission on migration had issued 238 decisions on requests for asylum, 190 of which had been favourable. Most of the requests for asylum, 141 of them, had been submitted by Afghan refugees. There were currently 500 requests pending before the commission.

12. With regard to immigration, her Government's priorities were the following: (a) to establish a reliable system for the regulation of migratory processes through the adoption and implementation of legislative and regulatory texts on the control of migration, immigration, freedom of movement and choice of residence; (b) assistance in the repatriation and resettlement of Belarusian nationals in the republics of the former Soviet Union; (c) legal protection of migrant workers from Belarus; and (d) resettlement of migrants who had fled from environmental disasters within the country.

13. **Ms. Fritsche** (Liechtenstein) said that during Ms. Ogata's tenure as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a role which she had performed remarkably well, the "global humanitarian map" had undergone fundamental changes at an unprecedented pace. Despite the efforts made to help displaced persons and refugees, at the beginning of a new century the crisis was continuing and even worsening. The United Nations system had not always been fully equipped to address such crises, and the obstacles in the way of an effective and rapid response to humanitarian disasters must be collectively addressed.

14. The issue of security must remain a priority. In recent years there had been a proliferation of internal armed conflicts and complex emergency situations, causing significantly higher risks for humanitarian operations and endangering their personnel. The United Nations must take determined action to guarantee the security of such personnel. The inclusion of attacks on humanitarian personnel in the list of war crimes in the statute of the International Criminal Court was a welcome step in that respect, but the Secretariat must take action, and financial constraints must not be a consideration. Both the credibility and the

effectiveness of the United Nations system were at stake.

15. Post-conflict situations also required increased attention, not only on the part of UNHCR, but also at the system-wide level. The establishment of a post-conflict peace-building unit within the Department of Political Affairs was an important step, and it was to be hoped that the consideration of the Brahimi report on peacekeeping operations would confirm the importance of post-conflict peace-building. The international community had paid a high price, at both the financial and the political levels, for its lack of attention to crisis situations in the aftermath of armed conflicts, and would continue to pay that price unless it changed its attitude in that respect.

16. Prevention was another area where enhanced political will was needed. The Secretary-General had stressed the importance of that issue to the work of the Organization; although there was some disagreement in that respect, it was a very useful approach, especially in relation to refugees. Establishing early-warning mechanisms as well as recognizing and addressing the root causes of conflicts at an early stage could go a long way towards alleviating the plight of refugees. The United Nations system needed to do more to address situations where claims based on the right of self-determination had the potential to erupt in violent conflicts, including mass displacements of people. A dialogue between the parties concerned would help prevent major humanitarian disasters. There was a need for a shift from reactive to proactive approaches.

17. The 50th anniversary of UNHCR in December 2000 would be an occasion to look back at a remarkable history, and also to look at the needs and challenges of the future. Her delegation welcomed the initiative taken by UNHCR to hold consultations on the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, on the understanding that those consultations would serve the purpose of ensuring its full implementation. The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol must continue to serve as the cornerstone of international refugee law.

18. Liechtenstein wished to extend a welcome to Mr. Ruud Lubbers, and assure him of its support.

19. **Mr. Kryazhirskiy** (Russian Federation) said that the problem of refugees was unfortunately one of the characteristics of the current era and, in order to resolve it, efforts must be coordinated in particular at the political, socio-economic, humanitarian and legal levels. The concepts of a collective approach and of preventive measures mentioned in the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (A/55/12) were essential.

20. It was in the first place the responsibility of Governments to resolve the problems of migration to their territories; over the past 10 years, his Government had taken important steps to improve the situation of refugees: it had acceded to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, adopted acts on refugees in 1993 and 1996 and decrees on the enforcement of those acts, established various mechanisms and infrastructures, defined the status of refugee and established a system for the control of migration and the granting of political and temporary asylum — guided by the programme of action adopted in 1996 at the Regional Conference of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a process which had been extended by five years on the decision of the Steering Group at its fifth session in June 2000, with the support of the States concerned, non-governmental organizations and international humanitarian organizations. His Government also reiterated its commitment to international humanitarian principles and to the concepts of solidarity and sharing of responsibilities set forth in the programme of action. It would not be possible to resolve the problem of migration in the region unless there was a balance between international solidarity and the responsibility of the Governments concerned, which was not yet the case. His Government welcomed the international financial assistance which had been provided — $10 million — but pointed out that it needed to be increased, and had for its part allocated $230 million for that purpose.

21. Humanitarian measures for the settlement of problems relating to refugees and displaced persons must be an integral part of the efforts made by the international community to resolve crises and move from emergency aid to the reorganization and recovery of civil society.

22. UNHCR should remain the principal institution in cases of crises; it had the appropriate personnel and means of action, and his Government supported the efforts of UNHCR to improve the effectiveness of its action and base it on the principles of impartiality, neutrality and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. His Government also supported the idea of global consultations on strengthening the regime of

protection and the implementation of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. It believed that the mandate of UNHCR should be enlarged.

23. Lastly, his Government wished to express its concern about the increase in premeditated and violent attacks against humanitarian personnel.

24. **Mr. Fall** (Guinea) said that his country, which had received more than 700,000 refugees, was the world's largest refugee host country in proportion to its population. The presence of so many refugees was attributable to the serious internal crises in three neighbouring countries, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau, which had triggered large-scale population movements towards Guinea.

25. The prolonged presence of refugees nonetheless had a negative impact on the host areas and on national development programmes. Furthermore, it created security and stability problems for Guinea. The country had been victim to a number of attacks which had caused the death of several hundred persons, major material damage and the displacement of more than 40,000 individuals. Refugees had been involved in those attacks.

26. Guinea, which had always fulfilled its humanitarian obligations, would not tolerate such a situation. Moreover, after the first attacks, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had invited the international community to make every effort to curb the phenomenon.

27. Guinea's commitment to refugees, however, had never waned, as evidenced by the National Assembly's adoption of a law on the status of refugees in Guinea and the recent establishment of a National Inter-ministerial Commission for Assistance to Refugees and Displaced Persons. On the occasion of the conference to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the OAU Convention on refugees, held in Guinea, in March 2000, and organized jointly by the Organization of African Unity and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the international community had thanked Guinea for its hospitality.

28. Anxious to pursue its action in favour of refugees and to ensure the security of humanitarian personnel, his Government attached importance to the following measures: resettlement of refugees far from border regions; identification of refugees with a view to shielding them from allies of the attackers; provision of adequate assistance to support the pursuit of the repatriation of Liberian refugees; and assistance from the international community to host areas for refugees and persons displaced as a result of rebel attacks. His Government took the opportunity to request the effective convening, under United Nations auspices, of a conference of solidarity with the Republic of Guinea.

29. Lastly, his delegation paid homage to Ms. Sadako Ogata for the excellent work she had carried out on behalf of refugees during her mandate. It congratulated Mr. Ruud Lubbers on his election as head of the Office of the High Commissioner and assured him of the full cooperation of his Government.

30. *Ms. de Wet (Namibia), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.*

31. **Ms. Monroy** (Mexico) congratulated Ms. Sadako Ogata, on behalf of her delegation, on the remarkable work she had done during nearly a decade at the helm of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

32. Throughout its history, Mexico had been a haven for many refugees, and had been enriched by their cultural, scientific and economic contributions. Mexico's host policy was based on the principles underlying its foreign policy, namely, the exercise of its sovereignty, solidarity, international cooperation and respect for human rights. It should be noted that, in April 2000, the Mexican Senate had approved Mexico's accession to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. Mexico's accession to those three instruments had been unanimously supported by the various parliamentary groups.

33. Over the past two decades, most of the refugees received by Mexico had been from Guatemala. Through the Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees, it had received support from UNHCR, then from the international community, particularly the European Union. Following the signature of the Guatemalan Peace Agreements, Mexico, with the support of UNHCR, had organized the repatriation of those refugees who wished to return home and the integration of those who had chosen to settle in Mexico.

34. During the fifty-first session of the Executive Committee of UNHCR, held in October 2000, Mexico had announced the presence in its territory of refugees

from more than 30 nations. As part of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of UNHCR, the Executive Committee had viewed a documentary film entitled "Mexico: tradition of asylum and refuge", which depicted the situation of men and women who had had to leave their countries in order to find refuge in Mexico. Within the current context of growing globalization, the case of Mexico could serve as an example to the international community.

35. Her delegation congratulated Mr. Ruud Lubbers on his recent election to the head of UNHCR and assured him of its full cooperation.

36. **Ms. Pérez-Contreras** (Venezuela) paid homage, on behalf of her Government, to Ms. Sadako Ogata for the remarkable manner in which, during the decade in which she had carried out her functions as head of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which had enhanced the international community's understanding of the problems of refugees and displaced persons. She wished every success to the new High Commissioner, Mr. Ruud Lubbers, and assured him of her country's will to continue cooperating with UNHCR.

37. According to the report of the High Commissioner, owing to conflicts both old and new, the High Commissioner's office had had to step up its action, intervening in particularly dangerous situations on behalf of both refugees and its own personnel. As they multiplied, crisis situations triggered larger population movements and there were now more than 22 million refugees.

38. While the fundamental role of UNHCR was to ensure international protection of refugees and find lasting solutions to the problem, countries of origin and destination must, for their part, prevent population displacements, respond to requests for asylum and create the necessary conditions for the voluntary return of refugees or displaced persons.

39. Given its long experience, the High Commissioner's office should be well prepared to adapt to the new situations created by population displacements. In that connection, international protection mechanisms must be strengthened on the basis of the relevant international legislation. Furthermore, a broad and non-restrictive interpretation should be given to instruments and principles in order to ensure that persons in need of protection received adequate treatment.

40. In order to address refugee issues properly, not only should the principle of asylum be strengthened, as suggested by UNHCR, but also partnership between UNHCR and various entities, including governments, international organizations, cooperation and financing institutions, civil society and churches. Partnerships would make it possible, in particular, to tackle crises more effectively and intervene right in the prevention phase.

41. In the quest for lasting solutions, account must be taken of the fact that, like peace, development and stability are indissociable from refugee issues. The norms and principles of international law must be adapted to developments in the global situation in order to foster the strengthening of international protection.

42. Anxious to fulfil its international commitments and to ensure the protection of displaced persons, her Government had set up mechanisms to guarantee such protection. Thus, the new Constitution recognized and guaranteed the right of asylum and refuge, in accordance with the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Moreover, the National Assembly would soon adopt a basic law on refugees and asylum-seekers, in accordance with the 1999 Constitution and the international treaties ratified by Venezuela.

43. Over the past two years, Venezuela had hosted refugees from neighbouring countries. In 1999, a technical committee composed of a number of ministries had been established to ensure that existing procedures were applied expeditiously and effectively, and that human rights were respected. In the case of Colombia, a binational prevention and protection mechanism had even been created, in cooperation with UNHCR, which had made it possible to ensure the voluntary return of displaced persons in complete safety and with dignity.

44. The safety of humanitarian personnel, who were doing remarkable work, should be ensured, since the perilous conditions in which they functioned sometimes endangered their lives and hindered humanitarian operations.

45. In addition, Venezuela supported the five areas for further action defined by the High Commissioner (A/55/12/Add.1, annex II): emergencies, security, complex population flows, peace-building and coexistence.

46. Lastly, Venezuela associated itself with the proposal to commemorate 20 June as "World Refugee Day".

47. **Ms. Wensley** (Australia) said that her Government wished to acknowledge the contribution of the outgoing High Commissioner, Mrs. Ogata, to the cause of the world's refugees, and welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to appoint Mr. Lubbers to succeed her.

48. Australia, which remained strongly committed to supporting UNHCR and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, wished the international protection system to operate in the most effective way possible.

49. The current international situation differed from that which had existed 50 years before, when UNHCR had been created and the 1951 Convention had been drafted. The Office must therefore be equipped with the means to meet the challenges ahead and to ensure that the international protection system could effectively carry out its mission on behalf of refugees.

50. The international protection system was jeopardized by a number of trends, including mixed migration flows, global mobility, differences in economic and social opportunity, the changing nature of conflicts, terrorism, people smuggling, and the abuse of asylum systems.

51. Increasing numbers of asylum-seekers did not follow the appropriate procedures, and wasted State resources, often to the detriment of those in greater need of protection.

52. In the quest for comprehensive and integrated solutions, Australia welcomed the global consultations, which would enable States to work together with UNHCR to resolve problems and to strengthen the international protection system.

53. One approach would be to assist countries of origin in meeting the basic needs of their inhabitants so they would not be forced to leave home. Australia had recently provided emergency drought relief to Afghanistan, which should reduce population displacement. Resources should also be mobilized to determine, in countries of first asylum, which refugees needed protection and which did not. The countries of first asylum and other donors should work together to provide temporary protection to refugees while durable solutions were found. More must also be done for countries of first asylum in particular.

54. With regard to resources, the principle of responsibility sharing in the provision of international protection should not obscure the fact that the capacity of States to provide resources was finite. Innovative funding sources must consequently be found.

55. Western States were spending US$ 10 billion yearly on determining the refugee status of some 500,000 asylum-seekers, of whom only a small percentage were refugees. The budget of UNHCR, at only US$ 1 billion, was insufficient to respond to the needs of more than 20 million refugees. Resources currently allocated to refugee determination in a number of destination countries could be better used to support sustainable repatriation and to assist countries of first asylum financially.

56. Another subject of concern for Australia was people smuggling, a growing international phenomenon organized by criminals whose activities were threatening the integrity of protection systems and regular migration programmes. To bring an end to that practice, Australia had developed a comprehensive strategy encompassing prevention, interception and reception, which aimed to tackle both people smuggling and protection for those who needed it.

57. UNHCR, which played a crucial role in the international protection system, needed to work efficiently and to focus on its core mandate. In a constantly changing environment, it should continuously review and reform its activities. Australia had been vigorously pursuing reform of the governance and budgetary processes of the Office, and perceptible changes had been noted in the following areas: greater focus on UNHCR's core mandate; multi-year strategic planning and setting of budget priorities; an improved balance between budget allocations and expected revenue; and strengthening of emergency preparedness and response capacity.

58. **Mr. Kpotsra** (Togo), speaking on behalf of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), of which his country currently held the presidency, said that not only did Africa have the greatest number of least developed countries with the lowest incomes, the heaviest debts, and the greatest number of persons with HIV/AIDS and of those living in the direst poverty, but it was also the region most severely affected by refugee movements: according to the High Commissioner's

report (A/55/12), at the end of 1999, in Africa there had been more than 6 million refugees and some 20 million internally displaced persons.

59. The African States, like all other States, had the fundamental responsibility for ensuring the protection of refugees and displaced persons and for providing them with all necessary assistance. Often, however, they could not do so because of their own development problems, which were frequently exacerbated by natural disasters. The international community should therefore provide them with assistance, taking their problems into consideration. Moreover, an examination of the treatment of refugees showed that African refugees were accorded less attention and fewer resources than refugees from other regions of the world. Similarly, no African country had a repatriation and resettlement programme comparable to those that had been launched in Kosovo, for instance. Accordingly, at its thirty-sixth ordinary session, the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government had expressed its grave concern regarding the discrimination against African refugees and displaced persons and had urged the international community to provide them with the same level of support and assistance as that provided to refugees and displaced persons in other regions.

60. The prolonged presence of refugees in a host country often had damaging consequences, including deterioration of the ecological, economic and social fabric. The international community should provide assistance not only to the refugees but also to the host countries. In that regard, he welcomed the decision of States Members of the United Nations at the Millennium Summit to strengthen international cooperation for countries hosting refugees and coordination of humanitarian assistance, as well as their decision to encourage regional and subregional mechanisms for preventing conflict and promoting political stability in Africa, and to ensure a reliable flow of resources for peacekeeping operations on the continent.

61. It was essential to find lasting solutions to the problems of refugees and displaced persons, not only because of their growing numbers but also because of their political, economic and social impact on host countries. UNHCR was working hard to that end, but that was not sufficient. In order to succeed, the international community must support such efforts as the Mano River initiative, a subregional reconstruction and post-conflict peace-consolidation programme implemented by the Economic Commission for Africa, whose purpose was to facilitate the resettlement and reintegration of refugees and displaced persons by encouraging employment- and income-generating activities. The international community should also support the reintegration activities being carried out in countries emerging from conflict by the United Nations Development Programme in conjunction with UNHCR, the World Bank, the International Labour Organization, the World Food Programme and non-governmental organizations.

62. Although the problems of refugees and displaced persons were often addressed in tandem, the international community seemed to devote less attention to the fate of displaced persons than it did to the situation of refugees. Yet displaced persons fled their homelands or habitual residence for the same reasons as refugees, and were confronted by the same problems. In January 2000, the Security Council had noted with concern that displaced persons, unlike refugees, did not benefit from a common protection regime. A legal instrument permitting the rendering of assistance to such persons should therefore be elaborated as a matter of urgency.

63. In the resolution on displaced persons which it had elaborated with UNHCR at a joint meeting in Conakry, OAU had invited its members to support and implement the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement elaborated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons. The General Assembly or UNHCR should now provide follow-up and devise standards — including on the basis of the above-mentioned Guiding Principles — to permit the problems of displaced persons to be satisfactorily resolved.

64. One way of effectively resolving the problem of refugees in Africa was to eradicate the root causes of conflicts, which lay at the heart of most mass displacements of populations. In that connection, he welcomed the report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318) prepared by the Secretary-General at the request of the Security Council. His delegation also applauded the establishment by the President of the General Assembly of an ad hoc open-ended working group to study the issue and to ensure follow-up to the implementation of the recommendations made by the

Secretary-General, agreed conclusion 1992/2 of the Economic and Social Council and questions relating to the eradication of poverty, the alleviation of debt and the fight against HIV/AIDS. It was to be hoped that the international community would pay due attention to the recommendations formulated by the Secretary-General in his report on the causes of conflict in Africa and to the proposals contained in the report of the ad hoc working group, and also that it would ensure the follow-up required.

65. **Ms. Boyko** (Ukraine) said that recent years had been extremely challenging for UNHCR, which had found itself providing assistance to ever-increasing numbers of refugees and to host countries, which were often impoverished. UNHCR had also been faced with the erosion of humanitarian principles characterized by forced repatriation, the refusal to host refugees or to allow humanitarian organizations to gain access to them, and the frequent undermining of the safety of humanitarian staff. The international community's support — not only in financial terms, but also in terms of an affirmation of political will — was essential to ensure that UNHCR could offer protection to refugees and displaced persons, provide durable solutions to their problems and thus contribute to a return of peace and stability in many countries.

66. Thanks to its liberal legislation on migration and its political stability, and despite economic hardship, Ukraine now attracted large numbers of refugees. As at 1 July 2000, an estimated 3,000 refugees from 44 countries had been living in its territory and more than 3,000 persons from Abkhazia had been granted temporary asylum. The refugees enjoyed the right to education and medical assistance; they also benefited from social services and were permitted to take up employment. Since January 1999, they also enjoyed the right to pensions and material assistance.

67. One of Ukraine's migration policy priorities involved the return of Crimean Tartars. To date, more than 265,000 formerly deported Tartars had returned to their homeland, where they accounted for more than 10 per cent of the population. Measures had been taken in their interests in the social and economic, political, legal and humanitarian spheres; they also benefited from international assistance. Ukraine was, moreover, determined to reduce the number of stateless persons. To that end, it had amended its citizenship laws and had concluded agreements with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to enable their citizens to acquire the citizenship of one of the other three countries more easily. Ukraine wished to thank the UNHCR office in Ukraine for providing Ukrainian migration-service authorities with the necessary technical facilities, methodical support and training for civil servants responsible for dealing with refugee issues.

68. Ukraine, as an initiator of the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, continued to support the measures adopted by the international community to strengthen the security of all humanitarian workers. Her delegation had studied the report of the Secretary-General on the safety and security of United Nations personnel (A/55/494) and endorsed the recommendations made therein. It also wished to stress the importance of the statement made by the President of the Security Council on 11 February 2000 (S/PRST/2000/4) which recognized the responsibility of all actors to ensure the security of United Nations and associated personnel as well as the personnel of humanitarian organizations.

69. Lastly, the Government of Ukraine wished to pay tribute to Mrs. Sadako Ogata for her work at the helm of UNHCR, and to welcome her successor, Mr. Ruud Lubbers.

70. **Ms. Gligorova** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) paid tribute to Mrs. Ogata for her outstanding work and welcomed her successor, Mr. Lubbers. It was regrettable that the beginning of the twenty-first century would be remembered as a period characterized by flagrant disrespect in many parts of the world, including the Balkans, for the fundamental principles of democracy.

71. The consequences of the crisis in Kosovo — which had posed a serious threat to the stability and security of countries in the Balkans and elsewhere — continued to be felt. Macedonia had hosted 360,000 refugees, accounting for 18 per cent of its total population. In keeping with the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, those persons had acquired the status of humanitarian refugees.

72. The international community had commended the efforts undertaken by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia towards the resolution of that huge humanitarian crisis, but it had failed, nonetheless, to provide the economic and financial assistance which it should have provided. The international community now should do its part by facilitating the return in full security to their homes of more than 6,000 persons still

residing in Macedonia. Half were currently staying in host families, the other half in group-accommodation facilities.

73. The Republic of Macedonia was all too conscious of the link between conflicts on the one hand and refugees and displaced persons on the other. The country's experience had shown that humanitarian assistance must be accompanied by political and confidence-building measures. Above all, however, conflict prevention and peace-building were required. In that connection, a centre for preventive action and conflict resolution had recently been established in Skopje.

74. The recovery and reconstruction of the Balkans region were essential. Obligations and promises should not remain a dead letter. The objective of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe was to achieve stable and prosperous democratic societies in that region. It was to be hoped that the recent political changes in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia would permit the region to take steps in that direction. Equally welcome was the fact that the Security Council had stressed that the protection of refugees and their rights was an integral part of its mandate to maintain international peace and security.

75. The achievements of UNHCR over its five decades of existence had been considerable. The agency currently provided protection and assistance to 22.3 million persons. The international community must ensure that it was able to fulfil that noble task, in close cooperation with non-governmental organizations, other United Nations agencies and development organizations.

76. **Mr. Palwankar** (International Committee of the Red Cross) said that, in recent months, the question of displaced persons had remained a major concern for States and humanitarian organizations; a high proportion of such persons were still not receiving any protection or assistance whether because the response to their needs was inadequate or because of the prevailing lack of security. As one of the leading humanitarian organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was firmly resolved to take an active part in the discussions under way on that matter and to promoting effective institutional cooperation on behalf of displaced persons.

77. Large-scale population movements within a country were usually a consequence of conflicts or internal disturbances affecting the entire civilian population. Problems relating to internal displacement could not therefore be resolved without understanding the plight of the civilian population and taking steps to improve it. ICRC believed that persons who had been displaced as a result of internal conflicts, most of whom were civilians, were protected by international humanitarian law and that that body of law, which was legally binding on both State and non-State actors, provided an adequate means of coping with most of the problems that arose in connection with population movements resulting from armed conflict. It also believed that responsibility for meeting the protection and assistance needs of displaced persons belonged, in the first instance, to States.

78. In the context of consultations on the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, ICRC wished to recall that the situation of internally displaced persons was not comparable to that of refugees as far as protection was concerned, as the legal regimes applicable to the two categories were not identical. In particular, persons displaced within a State, unlike refugees, were nationals of that State and, as such, benefited from the entire range of rights under domestic law.

79. As had been pointed out in discussions on humanitarian issues in recent weeks by relevant bodies of the United Nations and humanitarian organizations, acts of violence committed against humanitarian personnel were on the increase and humanitarian organizations sometimes had to scale down or even suspend their activities, thus leaving displaced persons without protection or assistance. ICRC pointed out in that connection that international humanitarian law required States to respect and protect humanitarian personnel working in conflict situations and that attacks on humanitarian workers, who were civilians, were considered to be war crimes.

80. The complexity and magnitude of the issue of displaced persons obliged humanitarian organizations to pool their efforts. It was in that context that ICRC was taking an active part in meetings of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Moreover it had the status of standing invitee and had lent its backing, through both its headquarters and its field delegations to the Senior Inter-Agency Network on Internal Displacement, and also to the Secretary-General's

special representative for internally displaced persons. At the same time, it remained firmly resolved to carry out its role as provided for in the Geneva Conventions, as a neutral and independent intermediary in situations of armed conflict.

81. **Mr. Paiva** (International Organization for Migration) paid tribute to the unstinting efforts made by Mrs. Ogata as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and welcomed the fact that the long-standing de facto partnership between his organization and UNHCR had been codified in a formal Memorandum of Understanding which had laid the foundation for clearer guidelines on operational collaboration and for regular consultation. The previous year's supplementary agreement on modalities for cooperation in the transport sector was an excellent example of such collaboration which had been of benefit to thousands of persons in places as different as Kosovo, Timor and Zambia.

82. There had never been a greater need for partnership between organizations dealing with human displacement. Today's world was characterized by population movements, the reasons for which were increasingly complex. That fact challenged traditional definitions and methods and it was appropriate to share views on such questions which affected States, intergovernmental bodies and NGOs. It was essential to plug the gaps in the international humanitarian order which had developed over the past 50 years, but without forsaking the significant gains that had been achieved. IOM welcomed in that connection the call to dialogue made by UNHCR through its "three circles" initiative relating to the 1951 Convention and looked forward to taking part in consultations on the so-called "outer", or third, circle which focused on tensions between migration concerns and refugee protection. Such difficulties were perhaps inevitable at the present time. As the *World Migration Report* amply demonstrated, seeking a future abroad had never been so realizable and there had never been such complex reasons for doing so: the opening of borders, the accessibility of transportation over long distances, the explosion of images and information about faraway places, the implosion of some States and the proliferation of conflicts and rights abuses. Managing migration flows while respecting humanitarian obligations consecrated in international law was all the more difficult. However, one could not be considered without the other and the past decade had shown that a holistic approach to international population flows was viable. IOM was pleased to be a partner with UNHCR in supporting the efforts of States to develop such approaches to refugee and migration issues. The two organizations were not only collaborating in capacity-building projects but also supported the growing number of regional consultation mechanisms where regional trends in population displacement and related problems could be discussed. The CIS Conference and its follow-up process were one example, but in other regions — Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas — the two organizations were also helping countries of origin, transit and destination to come together in dialogue and to respond to the challenge presented by migration.

83. IOM was unreservedly committed to further developing, in collaboration with UNHCR, a humanitarian regime that took account of special circumstances.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.